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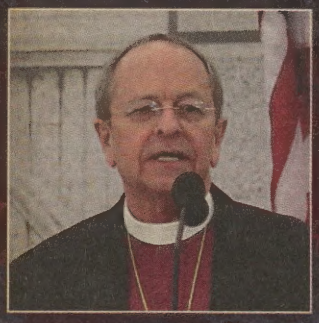

A GAY LOOK BACK

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Photos by AP, except gay band and Melissa Etheridge by Henry Linser

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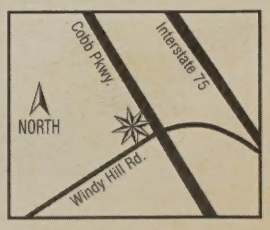

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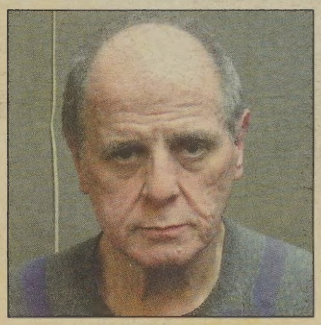

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'Were the World Mine' brings a gay teen's Shakespeare-inspired dreams to film. **Page 19**

Photo by AP

"This defendant is a kind and generous man who is particularly mindful of others' needs. He is the antithesis of the haughty bullying star. He was not himself when addled by the habitual and relatively long-lasting using of illegal drugs."

*Adrian Waterman, attorney for singer **"Boy George" O'Dowd**, after a British court sentenced O'Dowd to 15 months in jail for falsely imprisoning a male escort. O'Dowd had denied the charge. (Associated Press, Jan. 16)*

on the record

"There is no need to analogize the battle for the rights of gay and lesbian people to the struggle of African Americans to overcome slavery, Jim Crow and continued discrimination. But as Coretta Scott King said to me as she tried to imagine what position the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would take on 'don't ask, don't tell': 'What's the yardstick by which we should decide that gay rights are less important than other human rights we care about?'

Marion Frances Berry, former head of the federal Commission on Civil Rights, urging President-elect Obama to abolish the commission and create a broader group whose focus would include gay rights. (Queerty.com, Jan. 16)

"I wouldn't say it's as dark as 'Oz.' I don't know what could be, but this isn't."

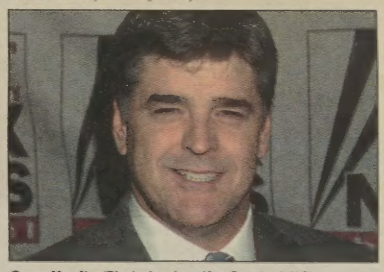
Showtime President Robert Greenblatt, dishing on "The Farm" (working title), a spin off of "The L Word" set in a women's prison, at the Television Critics Association winter press tour. (AfterEllen.com, Jan. 16)

"People always want to ask me 'Are you bisexual? Are you straight? Are you gay?' I've gotten so many of those questions, and I don't even know myself how to answer that. All I know is I'm in a straight relationship that I'm very happy in, and I never turned down the idea of dating women. I never turned down the idea of dating guys in the past. Women were who I fell in love with before."

***Sarah Rice**, part of the cast of MTV's "The Real World: Brooklyn," which debuted earlier this month (AfterEllen.com, Jan. 6)*

"It's appalling that the Hilton Doubletree Hotel chain is apparently so beholden to the mighty dollar that it would facilitate — in banquet rooms used by the public — a homosexual orgy boasting some of the most vile sex acts imaginable. … It's simply inexcusable that the Doubletree would place at risk the health of its staff and future guests by facilitating this orgy in rooms where food is served."

Sarah Rice (Photo by MTV)



Sean Hanity (Photo by Jennifer Graylock/AP)

Matt Barber, director of cultural affairs for the arch-conservative Liberty Alliance Action, denouncing the Washington, D.C., hotel for allowing an event in conjunction with the annual Mid Atlantic Leather Maneuvers weekend. (Barber press release, Jan. 16)

"You know, all along, I actually thought pastors were supposed to spread the love of God, not fan the flames of partisan hatred. Yeah, silly me."

*Fox News conservative commentator **Sean Hannity** on President-elect Barack Obama's selection of gay Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson to give the invocation at his Jan. 18 inauguration kickoff event (Media Matters, Jan. 13)*

"Currently there is discrimination. Heterosexual couples who have decided to spend their lives together are treated differently than same-sex couples who have … that same commitment to each other. I don't see the fairness of that. I don't see the need for that, and this bill will put an end to that."

Maine State Sen. Dennis Damon (D-Trenton) on why he introduced legislation to allow gay couples to marry in the state. (Associated Press, Jan. 14)

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AP Associated Press

Gay protest greets Rev. Rick Warren in Atlanta

Critics say Calif. preacher defies King's dream of inclusion

By MATT SCHAFER
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and LAURA DOUGLAS-BROWN
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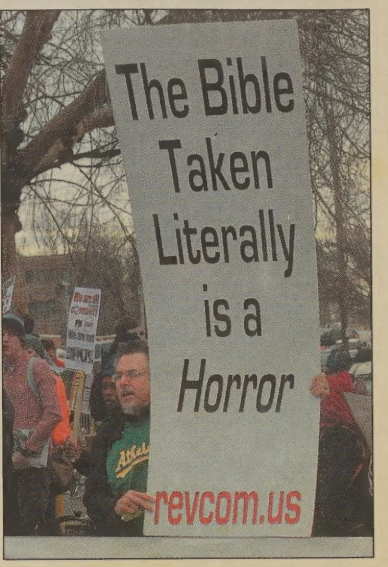


Above; below right: Gay rights activists gathered outside Ebenezer Baptist Church on Martin Luther King Jr. Day to protest Rick Warren giving the keynote address at the MLK commemorative service. (Photos by Matt Schafer)

Several dozen gay rights activists braved chilly temperatures Jan. 19 to counter Rev. Rick Warren's keynote address at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Commemorative Service at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church.

As churchgoers and political leaders filled the Ebenezer sanctuary, protesters led by the Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition and GLBT ATL carried signs including "We still have a dream. Equality," proclaiming Warren incompatible with the slain civil rights leader's dream of fairness and justice for all people. Other progressive activists joined in the effort, with signs decrying war and bigotry, and supporting equal marriage rights.

"On a cold morning, I think it's alright to stand in protest of the King Center's choice for [Warren] to be the keynote speaker. That's not beloved," Duncan Teague said. "I agree with Barack Obama's position of wanting to have a conversation, [but] a microphone in the hands of someone who has such negative views of gays, lesbians and bisexuals and our community is too much."

Warren, author of "The Purpose Driven Life" and pastor of Saddleback Church in California, is an outspoken critic of gay marriage. Gay rights activists, many of whom strongly backed Barack Obama's presidential campaign, were shocked and outraged last month when it was announced that Warren would give the invocation at Obama's Jan. 20 inauguration. News that Warren would also address King's church the day before added insult to injury for many.

"Martin never would have supported bigotry, but it's not about Martin, it's about who controls the legacy, and that's Bernice King," said Francis Brown of Atlanta, another protest participant.

Bernice King, the youngest of the King children, is an elder at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church led by Bishop Eddie Long. She helped organize a march in December 2004 with Long calling for black churches to become more vocal on issues including banning same-sex marriage, reforming the education and health care systems and creating economic opportunities for minorities.

KING CENTER DEFENDS WARREN While the commemorative service included a diverse mix of religions and ethnicities, including an Israeli ambassador and a Japanese pianist, no openly gay performers or speakers took part in the service. Other speakers included Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin and Dr. Julie Gerberding, outgoing director of the Atlanta-based federal Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Gerberding's comments included praise for a program dedicated to helping people with HIV.

Isaac Newton Farris Jr., president and CEO of the King Center, introduced Warren as a "man of God" at the service and accused the protesters outside the church as not understanding King's dream.

"When Pastor Warren was selected to deliver the invocation [at Obama's inauguration], it sparked a bit of controversy because of his views on same-sex marriage and abortion rights," Farris said.

"But you know, Pastor Warren is not so easy to pigeonhole as the average conservative," Farris continued, noting Warren's positions on poverty, global warming and AIDS.

Rev. **Rick Warren**, an outspoken critic of gay marriage, delivers the keynote address at Ebenezer Baptist Church during its Martin Luther King Jr. Day Commemorative Service. (Photo by Matt Schafer)

Farris suggested that those who would not have Warren speak at the King Day service and inauguration lack "maturity."

"The abiding principle of the beloved community is not that we must all agree; the principle is that we are all God's children and therefore are responsible to and for each other," Farris said. "Rick Warren has more than demonstrated not only his belief in this principle, but his actions every day prove it.

"There are those who feel that because of [Warren's] conservative views on some issues, he shouldn't be a speaker at this service," Farris added. "I submit to you that these are people who quite frankly do not understand the beloved community of Martin Luther King Jr.

"In the beloved community you will find both conservative and liberal, Christians, people of Jewish, Islamic and Hindu faiths, people of all races, gays and lesbians. In other words, you will find all of God's children in the beloved community," Farris added.

He pointed out that King's dream doesn't require all to agree, but respect each other.

"All of the great freedom movements are based upon freedom of speech," he said.

PROTESTERS DISAGREE ON TACTICS Warren took the podium after Farris to a standing ovation and shouts of "we love you" from the crowd. As his remarks began, Sunsara Taylor, a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party and World Can't Wait, stood in the lower part of the sanctuary, unfurled a cloth banner and called Rick Warren a bigot. She was removed by security and a parishioner grabbed her banner and threw it after her.

Craig Washington of the Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition, which helped organize the protest, said that in meetings prior to the protest, World Can't Wait agreed not to engage in any antagonistic tactics.

"It was a complicated message that we were so careful in sending," Washington said, noting he and others wanted to strike a respectful tone in protesting an African-American church on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Taylor disagreed. "You can't work together with someone who preaches that homosexuality is a sin and works to take away the legal rights of gay people," she told Atlanta Progressive News.

"There's no common ground between [that view] and people who think gay people are human beings and deserve all the same rights as everyone else."

Taylor's action caused Warren to pause as she and several supporters were removed from the sanctuary, then he set aside much of his prepared remarks to give a largely impromptu hour-long sermon on God's "unconditional love."

"Think about the changes we have been through in our lifetime, from lynchings to

Please see **PROTEST** on **Page 5**

Warren's anti-gay views counter to King's vision

PROTEST, Continued from **Page 4**

an African-American president — that's an amazing thing," Warren said. "But there is one thing that will not change, and that is that God loves you."

"When you know that love, it takes that hurt and that anger right out of you," he continued, noting that "it was the love of God" that allowed Martin Luther King Jr. not to shout back when "segregationists called him every name in the book."

WARREN 'NOT THE RIGHT PERSON'?

Warren did not directly address the protests against him, but much of his sermon dealt with focusing on God in the face of criticism or opposition. He invoked the hymn "We Shall Overcome" to talk about the word's significance in the Bible and what it takes to "overcome."

"A quiet and humble response" and "civility" will overcome anger, he said, and "love will always overcome fear."

Warren's sermon used the Biblical story of God telling Moses to lay down his staff, which he said represented identity, influence and income, to call on worshipers to dedicate their lives to God.

"Here is the point: If you want to be used by God, like Dr. Martin Luther King was used by God, you've got to lay it down. ... even if means you will be misunderstood, maligned, criticized," he said.

Michael Brewer, a gay senior at Morehouse College, joined Monday's protest at Ebenezer Baptist Church before giving a speech at the city's official MLK Day march. (Photo by Matt Schafer)

"When you are in the center of God's will, people will say things about you, and you have to decide who you want to impress," Warren said. "I challenge you to live for an audience of one. Because it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks."

Warren went on to discuss his wife's calling to help AIDS orphans in Africa and their decision to minister to people with HIV. He did not address the devastating impact the disease continues to have on gay and bisexual men.

Near the end of his remarks, he quoted "the great theologian Rodney King" to ask, "Can't we all just get along?"

However, gay activists said Warren's message differs greatly from the vision of Martin Luther King Jr.

"Any person who preaches the exclusion of any group of people, we take opposition to that, yes, we do," said Darlene Hudson of the Atlanta Black LGBT Coalition. "He's not the right person to be here because of his extreme views. He compares woman who have had abortions to Nazis in the holocaust; that's a hard blow."

'DEFINE AND REDEFINE'

During the protest, Winston Johnson stood across the street from the gravesite of his friend, Coretta Scott King. He held a sign above his head reading "Marriage denied 42 years" and showing a picture of himself and his partner.

"I met Mrs. King the day after her husband was assassinated, and we became close friends, but I didn't actually come out to her until 1986," Johnson said. He is credited with helping Mrs. King to become involved with the gay rights movement.

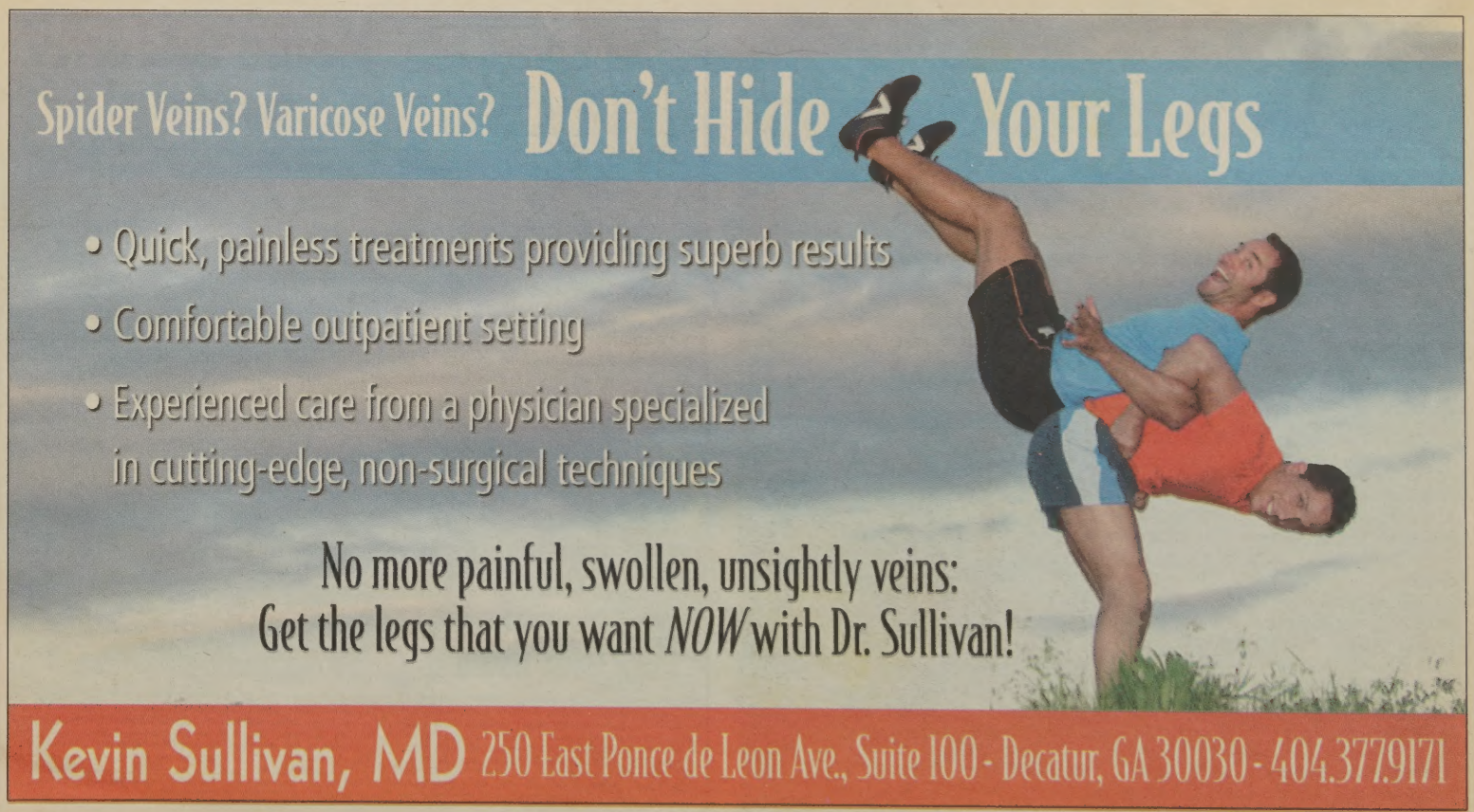
"I know she would just be ill to know that this man [Warren] has been invited here," Johnson said. "He's compared us to incest and pedophilia, and that's a horrible message for young people who are just dealing with being gay."

Later on Monday, a contingent of gay rights supporters joined in the citywide MLK Jr. Day march. For several years, the official MLK Day organizers have included a gay, lesbian or transgender speaker. This year, Michael Brewer, a senior at Morehouse College who spearheaded the "No More No Homo" project at the historically black men's college, addressed the crowd at the official King march.

"It was one of those seminal moments where you define and redefine who you are in the community," Brewer said of the experience. In his speech he argued that to fully embrace King's legacy, civil rights should be expanded in scope and time.

Umair Hassan, a gay Pakistani student at Georgia Tech, said even though he has only been in the country for five months, supporting change was important.

"I feel that what will happen in America will influence the rest of the world, directly or indirectly, so I feel it's important to contribute to America's change," he said. "This is not a religious issue, this is a secular state and this is a civil rights problem."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Gay Atlanta photographer accused of child porn, selling drugs

Salles held on federal charges with no bond

By DYANA BAGBY
dbagby@sovo.com

Atlanta gay nightlife photographer Gary Salles was arrested in Winchester, Tenn., during an undercover operation and charged with running an international child porn operation and selling crystal methamphetamine, according to police.

Salles, 57, faces federal child porn and drug charges and is currently being held without bond in Chattanooga, Tenn., said Winchester Police Department Chief Dennis Young. Arrested with Salles was Mike Lattimore, 50, who is charged with distribution of crystal meth and is being held without bond in Chattanooga. The two men go before a grand jury Jan. 27, Young said. Additional charges are likely, he added.

"[Salles] runs an offshore website for the distribution of child pornography," Young said. "We first became involved [in the investigation] because of [Salles'] meth sales here."

According to Young, Salles and Lattimore first corresponded with undercover agents via email several weeks ago. Working with the Winchester Police Department were the Franklin Police Department's internet crime squad and the Atlanta and Tennessee offices of the FBI. Investigators then asked to meet Salles and Lattimore in person at a hotel in Winchester, Young said. Undercover officers met with them while surveillance video captured the exchange.

"Normally [Salles] does stuff by mail, but on the second round we said we wanted it hand-delivered," Young said.

The men had approximately 450 files of child pornography with them, about 50 videos and 400 still images, he added.

"There were minor children involved in sexual acts, from infants to pre-teens. There was bondage — you name it, they had it. They brought a sampling of what they had," Young said.

Salles and Lattimore also had crystal meth valued at $2,000, police said.

News Channel 5 in Nashville reported Salles and Lattimore offered to sell a boy, aged 13 or 14, for $10,000 as well. Chief Young said the suspects "offered up" a teen boy for sexual "services" but the investigators did not ask them to bring a boy with them to Tennessee.

On Salles' Myspace page, he states, "I'm bi-sexual. I like men AND boys!"

Salles also states on his Myspace page that he is owner of GSalles photography and is a party promoter.

"I got my start 30 years [sic] as a gossip columninst [sic] and 'around town' photographer and I spealized [sic] in helping young GLBT and Questioning kids look and feel FAB-U-Lous.

Gary Salles (left) and **Mike Lattimore** were arrested Jan. 17 in Winchester, Tenn. (Photos courtesy Franklin Police Department)

"My big thing today is making new friends and surrounding myself with people who are newly out and seeking friends who don't just want to jump their bones... but really help them navigate thru uncharted waters," it also states on Salles' Myspace page.

Winchester, Tenn., located in Franklin County, is more than 200 miles from Atlanta. Ben Elliott, former proprietor of the Atlanta gay bar Hoedowns, was arrested in Winchester late last year and faces federal charges of wire fraud. Elliott was scheduled to be sentenced Jan. 20 in federal court, but his sentencing hearing was postponed until Feb. 25, according to court documents.

Asked via email about whether he played a role in Salles and Lattimore's arrest, Elliott responded, "I read about this like everyone else. I would refer you to my counsel for any further comment."

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta is handling Elliott's prosecution. Patrick Crosby, spokesperson for the office, declined comment. Atlanta FBI spokesperson Steve Lazarus also declined comment on the Salles case.

Salles once served on the committee that produced Atlanta's Pearl Day, an HIV fundraiser. He has also occasionally submitted photos for publication in David Atlanta magazine, which is owned by the same company that owns Southern Voice.

Brian Sawyer, chairman and owner of Pearl Days, LLC, said Salles had not been associated with the event since 2007.

"Our general reaction is that we are appalled and surprised," Sawyer said. "We certainly had no idea of any of his personal affairs. He was very professional with our organization in the years past, and Atlanta Pearl Days strives for excellence in our community.

"Our best wishes go out to any and all victims, and our thoughts are with them," Sawyer continued.

After a hiatus in 2008, Sawyer said plans are underway for a series of 2009 Pearl Day events, beginning in June around Atlanta Pride and culminating in a main event on Sept. 11.

Laura Douglas-Brown contributed

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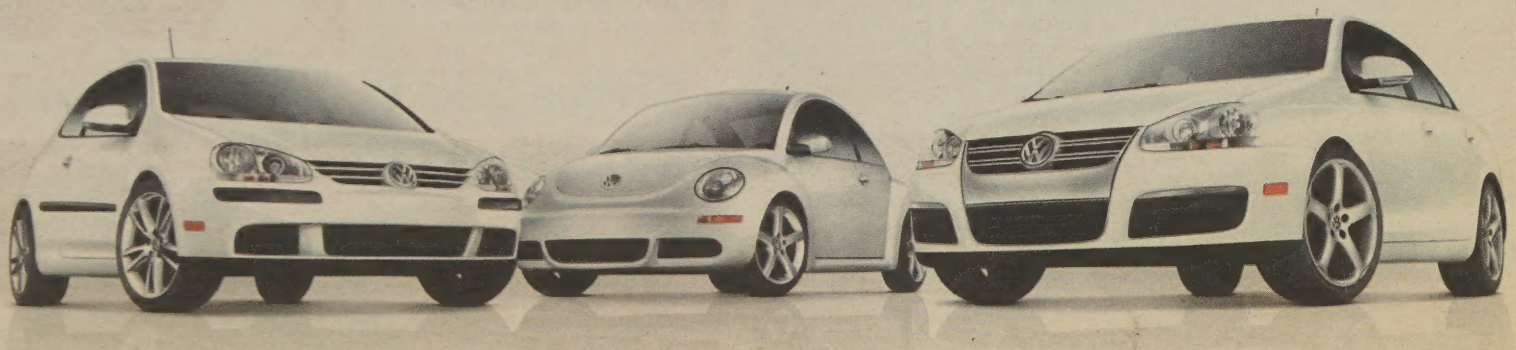

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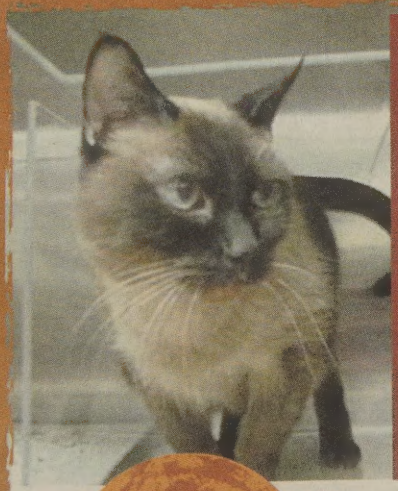

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National confab targets HIV rates among black gay men

Young men undergo 'rite of passage' with prevention education

By DYANA BAGBY
dbagby@sovo.com

The fifth annual National African-American MSM Leadership Conference on HIV/AIDS is expected to attract some 300 people from across the country to Atlanta to discuss ways to slow HIV rates among black men who have sex with men.

"'MSM' is the term used in the field because men who have sex with men don't always identify as gay, they won't go to outwardly gay events or pick up gay-related literature," said Terence McPhaul, conference publicity chairperson. He is also the coordinator for the Department of Health Education & Prevention at Atlanta-based National AIDS Education & Services for Minorities Inc., which sponsors the conference.

The event, which began Jan. 22 and continues through Jan. 25, is open to HIV healthcare providers and the general public.

"During the leadership conference, we are encouraging attendees and supporters to take charge and help develop strategies that ultimately strengthen and mobilize African-American men and those who support communities of color with taking responsibility for their lives and the lives of the people they encounter," said Rudolph Carn, NAESM founder and CEO, in a statement.

This is the first time the conference has been held in Atlanta and the theme is "Our People, Our Work, Our Success."

With President Barack Obama being sworn in on Jan. 20 and Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday on Jan. 19, NAESM thought Atlanta — a centerpiece in the Civil Rights Movement — was the appropriate place for the conference.

"We really wanted to pay attention to the events of MLK Weekend and the inauguration," McPhaul said. "This is about the importance of inclusion and equality, especially for black MSM."

In 2005, a five-city study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention showed that of the gay and bisexual men who were surveyed, 46 percent of black men were HIV-positive. This meant black men who have sex with men were nearly twice as likely to be infected with HIV than other gay and bisexual men. Among the black men in the study who were living with HIV, 67 percent did not know.

"This conference is really about empowering people with the tools they need to take back to their communities and help reduce the spread of HIV," McPhaul said.

NAESM's program for young men, CRIBB (Creating Responsible Intelligent Black Brothers), will have its first graduation ceremony on Saturday from 8-10 p.m., considered a "rite of passage" for young black men who want to slow the spread of HIV and AIDS in the black community.

"Many of our youth had projects this year in the development of prevention methods in their area. We provided mentors and we are really trying to teach them valuable skills to take back to their communities," McPhaul added.

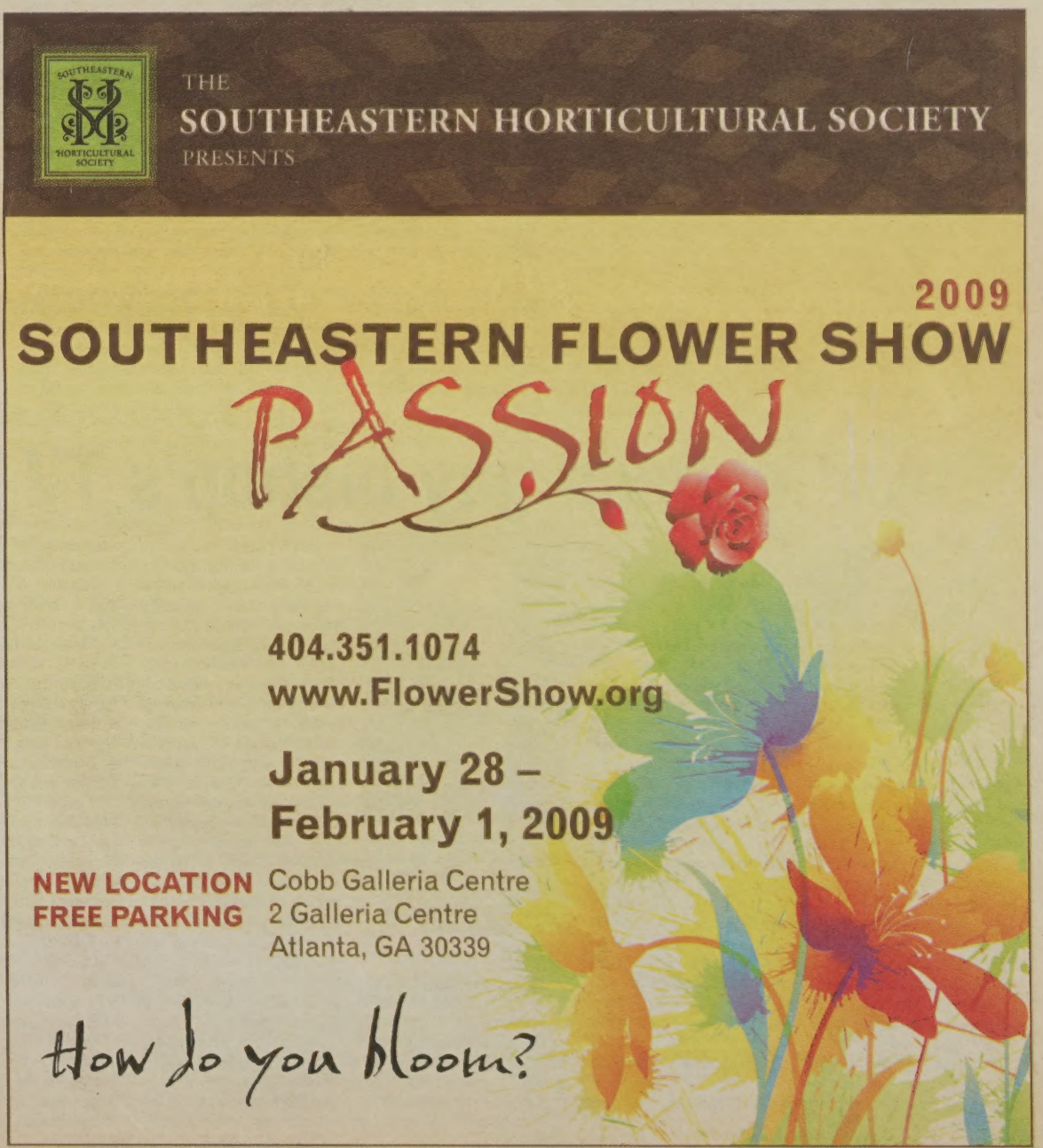
Speakers include Dr. Kevin Fenton, an openly gay man who is director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, & TB Prevention at the CDC.

Other speakers include Dr. David Malebranche, assistant professor at Emory University's School of Medicine and who sees his own patients at the Grady Infectious Disease Center, Christopher Bates, acting director of the Office of HIV/AIDS Policy at the Department of Health & Human Services; as well as Lajon "Mike" Survillion, star of Logo's "Shirts & Skins" reality TV series about gay basketball players.

The conference offers participants different "tracks" throughout the weekend, such as executive director/board development, community planning, HIV prevention and care strategies, community mobilization and awareness, and youth and young adults.

"All of our tracks are very informative and even if you attended the conference last year, we make sure you can add to what you learned previously," McPhaul said. "This is a time to inquire of the experts; that's why we make them accessible."

Dr. **David Malebranche** of Atlanta is a speaker at the National African-American MSM Leadership Conference on HIV/AIDS. (Photo courtesy Emory University)



Obama era begins

'All are equal, all are free,' new president tells massive inaugural crowd

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

INAUGURATION '09

Gay people from across the country joined more than a million people Tuesday at the U.S. Capitol and on the National Mall to witness Barack Obama take the oath of office as the 44th president and become, in the minds of many activists, the nation's most gay-supportive president.

In his inaugural address, Obama called on the country to strive for equal rights and justice for all, but did not specifically mention his longstanding support for gay civil rights as he did in many campaign speeches.

The omission of gays and other constituency groups from the inaugural address did not appear to bother gay rights supporters who braved the frigid weather to attend the inauguration.

For many activists, especially black gays, Obama's precedent-setting role as the nation's first African-American president — along with his strong support for the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans — elicited deep, personal feelings about their outlook on the country.

"I think that at this moment, I am more proud to be an American than I have ever been," said Michael Crawford, a black gay activist and Obama campaign volunteer.

"And when I say that, I don't mean to say that I have ever not been proud to be an American," Crawford said. "But watching Barack Obama be sworn into the presidency as the first African American ever, and not only watching him but seeing the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people of all races, all sexual orientations, all ages, all economic classes together celebrating that fact was absolutely amazing."

Crawford and other activists noted that while Obama did not mention gays in his inaugural address, his new administration acted quickly to include gays in its first White House actions.

Seconds after Chief Justice John Roberts administered the oath of office to Obama, a detailed narrative describing Obama's support for gay rights legislation popped up on the White House web site, www.whitehouse.gov.

On the site's "Civil Rights" page, which includes the official White House logo, Obama's support for a gay and trans-inclusive hate crimes prevention bill, an employment non-discrimination bill covering gays and transgender people, and overturning "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," among other gay-related issues, are discussed under a section titled "Support for the LGBT Community."

The section also mentions Obama's call for the repeal of the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act and his support for new legislation that would provide full marriage-related rights and benefits for same-sex couples joined in civil unions or domestic partnerships.

While praised by gay groups, the web site's changes were quickly denounced by the anti-gay Liberty Alliance, which called the changes a signal that Obama has adopted the "homosexual agenda."

Just seconds after President **Barack Obama** was sworn in Tuesday, the official White House web site was updated to include his commitments on a range of gay rights initiatives. (Photo by AP)

'ALL EQUAL, ALL FREE' In his inaugural address, Obama discussed themes of national unity at home and improved relations with the global community.

"The time has come to reaffirm our endur-

Please see **OBAMA** on **Page 11**

'Error' caused gay bishop's TV blackout

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

Gay Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson's opening prayer at President Obama's inaugural celebration Sunday at the Lincoln Memorial was not televised due to an unspecified "error," according to a spokesperson for the inaugural committee.

"We had always intended and planned for Rt. Rev. Robinson's invocation to be included in the televised portion of the program," Josh Earnest, director of communications for the Presidential Inaugural Committee, said in a statement.

"We regret the error in executing this plan — but are gratified that hundreds of thousands of people who gathered on the mall heard his eloquent prayer for our nation that was a fitting start to our event."

Earnest's statement did not provide any details on the cause of the error or who was responsible for the misstep.

HBO, the exclusive broadcaster of the event, said in a statmeent that a "miscommunication within the Presidential Inaugural Committee" was the reason Robinson's invocation was omitted from the broadcast.

The network noted, however, that the invocation would be part of its future rebroadcasts of the event. Rebroadcasts are slated for Saturday and Sunday.

Robinson said in an interview on Tuesday that he considered his omission from the initial broadcast to be "water over the dam."

"It doesn't matter who did it," he said. "I honestly think it was just something that just fell through the cracks. And I could not have been more wonderfully treated by the inauguration committee, frankly."

Rev. **Gene Robinson** gave the invocation at President Barack Obama's Jan. 18 inauguration kick-off, but his prayer was not included in HBO's broadcast of the event. (Photo by Alex Brandon/AP)

Those who attended the event saw Robinson deliver a prayer that, among other things, acknowledged the civil rights struggle of gays and transgender people.

Upon learning that Robinson's appearance came before HBO started its coverage of the event, gay activists asked the inaugural committee for an explanation.

Robinson walked on stage at the foot of the steps of the Lincoln Memorial about 2:20 p.m. Sunday, some 10 minutes before the 2:30 p.m. start of the event, as previously announced by HBO and the Obama Inaugural Committee.

Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, said it was nonetheless "profoundly disappointing and disturbing" that Robinson was not part of the initial broadcast.

"Bishop Gene Robinson is an inspiration to millions worldwide because he lives out the ideals of courage, humility and truth speaking," she said. "It is profoundly disappointing and disturbing that HBO viewers did not have the opportunity to watch Robinson, a genuine hero to so many in our community and others around the globe, give his powerful prayer at Sunday's We Are One inaugural event."

A spokesperson for HBO told gay blog AfterElton.com that the broadcast of the event was scheduled to begin at 2:30 p.m. by prior agreement with the Inaugural Committee.

"The producer of the concert has said that the Presidential Inaugural Committee made the decision to keep the invocation [by Robinson] as part of the pre-show," HBO said in a statement.

More than 400,000 people were estimated to have attended the Lincoln Memorial celebration, which included performances by prominent singers and entertainers. Obama also spoke at the event.

The omission of Robinson's invocation prayer from the broadcast could be viewed by some as a slight by Obama and his inaugural planners. Activists raised strong objections last month when the Inaugural Committee announced that megachurch pastor and gay marriage opponent Rick Warren would deliver the opening prayer at the inaugural swearing-in ceremony at the U.S. Capitol.

Warren emerged last year as a strong supporter of California's Proposition 8, which repealed the state's same-sex marriage law. In statements on behalf of the ballot proposition, Warren compared gay marriage to incest, drawing expressions of outrange from gay activists.

Obama, a long-time supporter of gay rights, said he strongly disagreed with Warren's position on the issue and that he chose Warren for the inauguration's opening prayer as a gesture of unity and to build bridges between his Democratic administration and the socially conservative Christian community.

White House web site gets early gay makeover

OBAMA, continued from **Page 10**

ing spirit, to choose our better history, to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness," he said.

In a reference to his foreign policy initiatives, Obama noted that "America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more."

The night he won the presidency, Obama told a crowd in Chicago that his victory was an answer to the question of whether America remained a place "where all things are possible."

"It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled, Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red states and blue states," he said on that November night. "We are, and always will be, the United States of America."

During a pre-inaugural concert on Sunday at the Lincoln Memorial, Obama made a similar call for unity by listing the same groups, including "gay and straight," in a speech on the memorial's steps.

President **Barack Obama** and First Lady **Michelle Obama** dance together Tuesday at the Mid-Atlantic States Ball. (Photo by Meaghan Gay)

INAUGURATION '09

The Lincoln Memorial event drew criticism from some gay activists when the opening prayer delivered by gay Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson was omitted from the televised coverage of the concert. **(See related story, Page 10.)**

Many activists considered Obama's decision to invite the openly gay Robinson to participate in the Lincoln Memorial event as a way of offsetting Obama's earlier decision to invite Rev. Rick Warren, pastor of the Saddleback Church in California and an outspoken gay marriage opponent, to deliver the invocation at the inauguration ceremony at the Capitol.

Warren's remarks at the inauguration included a recitation of the Lord's Prayer and were conciliatory in tone. He made no mention of his support for Proposition 8, the ballot measure that repealed California's same-sex marriage law.

"Help us, O God, to remember that we are Americans, united not by race, or religion, or blood, but to our commitment to freedom and justice for all," he said.

H. Alexander Robinson, executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition, a gay advocacy group, said he saw a large number of people turn their backs on the inaugural stage when Warren spoke. He said he was standing in a section of the Mall closest to the Capitol.

"I thought it was interesting that all around me there were individuals who turned their backs on Rev. Warren during his prayer," Robinson said. "That was noticed by the people around us. It went fairly uncommented on, but there were dozens of people in the area that I was in that quietly registered our protest."

Robinson cautioned against gays dwelling on the Warren selection and the perception that Robinson's exclusion from the televised broadcast of the Lincoln Memorial event might have been deliberate.

"If we look for reasons and ways in which we might be overlooked or slighted, we'll always be able to find them," Robinson said. "But I think that Obama's message was clearly an inclusive one."

He added, "Whatever happened with Bishop Robinson, we should move on, because we have serious work to get done. And so we should focus our people on achieving both the objectives for the LGBT community and for our nation as a whole."

'DAWN OF NEW ERA'

Officials with other national gay advocacy groups appeared to agree with Robinson.

"It is our hope this truly marks the dawn of a new political era of engagement in the life of our country," said Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, in commenting on Obama's inauguration.

"The fact that the official White House web site was updated [Tuesday] with a list of commitments to LGBT rights is already enormous positive change," she said.

Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said Obama's inauguration represented a "paradigm shift" for the nation.

"The pendulum has swung away from the anti-gay force and toward a new president and vice president who acknowledge our equality," Solmonese said.

But the changes were not welcomed by all. Matt Barber, director of cultural affairs with the social conservative groups Liberty Alliance and Liberty Counsel, called the Obama administration's addition of a gay-rights section to the White House web site an ominous sign of things to come.

"I suspect the immediate, stark and 'in your face' changes made to the White House web site are a metaphor for what we can expect, in terms of policy, from his administration," Barber said in a statement. "The gravity of this situation cannot be overstated. Right out of the shoot, Obama has told the world that he is signing off, without exception, on every demand of the extremist homosexual and transsexual lobbies."

Gays, celebs come Out for Equality

Star-studded unofficial ball honors Obama

By AMY CAVANAUGH

Hollywood descended on Washington this week for the inauguration of President Obama and after the frigid swearing-in and parade, all those people needed someplace to party.

In addition to the 10 official Inaugural Balls, dozens of unofficial balls dotted the city's nightlife scene Tuesday, including one crowded party for the gay set, Out for Equality.

Held at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel, the party drew about 2,500 revelers, including gay actor Sir Ian McKellen, who briefly took to the stage.

"You are the cherry on top of my cake," he said. "It's been a wonderful day for me."

Also in attendance was actress Jamie Lee Curtis, members of the band Betty, who are well known for their appearances on "The L Word," and gay Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson, who was pursued all evening by a camera crew.

Out for Equality was an unofficial ball, so Obama and the first lady were not in attendance. But Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick (D) was there, along with his wife, Diane, and daughter Katherine, who came out last summer as a lesbian. Patrick spoke for several minutes and urged the crowd to "make a claim on your government."

The ball also attracted the gay political set. U.S. Rep Jared Polis (D-Colo.), the newest openly gay member of Congress, was there, as was Michael Guest, a gay former U.S. ambassador to Romania. Bisexual Arizona State Del. Kyrsten Sinema and gay New York Assemblyman Daniel O'Donnell also joined the crowd.

Scores of people paid $375 each to spy Sir Ian McKellen, hear **Melissa Etheridge** and other performers, and enjoy the open bar Tuesday at Out for Equality. (Photo by Henry Linser)

Hosting the ball was the irreverent Ross Matthews — "Ross the Intern" on "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno" — and there were performances by lesbian folk singer Catie Curtis, gay saxophonist Dave Koz and gay singer Rufus Wainwright.

Also performing was Grammy-winning singer Thelma Houston, gay favorite Cyndi Lauper and lesbian singer Melissa Etheridge. Potomac Fever, an ensemble from the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, also took to the stage at one point.

Musically, the highlight was when Curtis, Wainwright, Houston and others joined a barefoot Lauper on stage to perform a rendition of "Girls Just Want To Have Fun."

All the performers took a moment to wax political about the incoming administration, and Etheridge linked her coming out to one of Bill Clinton's inaugural balls.

"Sixteen years ago I came out at the Triangle Ball," she said. "I was so inspired, so proud to be lesbian, and I never regretted that. We've come a long way, and been through so much."

She added that the "best thing to do every day is let everyone else know who we are."

Linda Holtzman, who came from Philadelphia for the inauguration and ball, said Obama's swearing in "for the first time made me feel patriotic."

She said that the best scene of the day was after the inauguration "when you saw Bush get on a helicopter and fly away. It was uplifting."

Gay musicians brave cold to march in parade

Band greeted with some heckling before parade

INAUGURATION '09

By CHRIS JOHNSON

Members of the Lesbian & Gay Band Association braved sub-freezing temperatures Tuesday to become the first gay contingent to participate in a president's inaugural parade.

The 177 slots in the contingent for LGBA, a federation of gay bands from across the country, were filled with performers from 24 bands and included musicians, flag twirlers, honor guard and banner holders. Performers wore blue berets and silver baseball-style jackets.

Officials estimate that around 2 million people crowded the National Mall and surrounding areas to witness President Obama's swearing-in ceremony and the inaugural festivities that followed along Pennsylvania Avenue.

The day's temperatures hovered around 30 degrees, making the start of Obama's presidency the coldest Inauguration Day since President Reagan began his second term in 1985.

Judy Ames, a lesbian clarinet player for the Flower City Pride Band in Rochester, N.Y., and an inaugural committee co-chair for LGBA, said the band was "really proud" of its performance and the crowd's reaction was "really very positive."

"It was a little tough early on, playing in the dark, once things got delayed an hour," she said, "and we didn't play for a whole lot of people down the route, but it was really a thrill to play for the president, which is what we were there for."

Performers played several songs including "The Manhattan Beach March," "Brand New Day," "Hold on I'm Comin'" and "The Ode to Joy."

The contingent played the "The Washington Post" march when it reached the reviewing stand, where Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama and Vice President Joe Biden witnessed the performance.

"We really wanted to do something that was very patriotic and respectful of the situation, so we were happy to do it, and we think it sounded great," she said.

Ames said the Obamas and Biden "definitely stepped forward to the glass and paid full attention, smiled and waved, and we were just really excited to see that."

Band members faced some heckling. As band members were queuing up to perform in the parade, a protester shouted "homosexuality is a sin" through a megaphone, Ames said.

Temperatures were below freezing when the Lesbian & Gay Band Association marched in the inaugural parade for President Obama. (Photo by Henry Linser)

"It was just one guy out there by himself with a megaphone," she said. "[Normally] when we come up against that, we'll just play and drown them out, but we were not allowed to play on the back street where we walked up to the parade, so we just walked through it and it was no big deal."

'FABULOUS GAY BAND' LGBA participated in President Clinton's inauguration festivities in 1993 and 1997, but performed on the sidelines and was not a contingent in the parade. The group declined to pursue an opportunity to participate in President Bush's inauguration festivities in 2001 and 2005.

The band had its dress rehearsal Monday at St. Elizabeth's, a federally operated psychiatric hospital, and marched around the facility's grounds. Marita Begley, one of the drum majors for the band, urged marchers at that rehearsal to tighten their step.

"On the turn, if you're turning right, you guide right!" she shouted. "You got to stay shoulder-to-shoulder on the turn. Don't swing out!"

By the end of the morning rehearsal, Begley commended players for making improvements.

"Looking good, gang! How we feeling?" she asked, and musicians responded with an enthusiastic shout.

"You're the fabulous gay band that you always knew we would be!" she said at the end of morning rehearsal.

Michelle Wetzel, 46 and a lesbian trombone player for Lakeside Pride Freedom Band in Chicago, said she came to D.C. to participate in the inauguration because "the event is so huge in importance."

"I just felt I had to be here, be a part of it," she said, "not only for the historic aspect of [inaugurating] our first black president of the United States, but to be invited as the first openly gay ensemble … to perform in the inauguration — it was just too big not to be here for it."

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Gay Atlantans trek to D.C. for Obama's inauguration

INAUGURATION '09

By MATT SCHAFER
mschafer@sovo.com

President Barack Obama's inauguration was one of the most watched events in memory, and scattered throughout the sea of humanity that swelled into Washington, D.C., were gay Atlantans looking for a connection with history.

Kecia Cunningham has her own entry in history as the first openly gay person of color to be elected to political office in Georgia. The Decatur City Commission member broke into tears when Obama was elected and wouldn't allow herself to miss the inauguration.

"I had to be a part of it, as an African-American, as a sexual orientation minority, it needed to happen," Cunningham said. "It didn't seem to be an expense or a burden at all. I feel like I was blessed to be there."

Cunningham watched the ceremony standing near the frozen-over reflecting pond in front of the Lincoln Memorial. She couldn't see the president, but she watched enormous television screens broadcasting the ceremony and worked her way forward in the crowd.

"It will be something I will never forget," Cunningham said.

Everyone Southern Voice contacted was impressed with the diversity and respectful behavior of the crowds, estimated at 1.4 million on the mall.

Don George is a prolific supporter of the Democratic Party. He received his tickets as a reward for his work on Obama's GLBT Steering Committee, and said he made a lot of friends on inauguration day, even though he doesn't know many of their names.

"Right after [Obama] said, 'So help me God' and the cannons went off, I started crying, and I looked around and every one else was cheering and going crazy," he said. "It was a great high, a wonderful natural high."

For Ken Britt, this was his first inauguration as an insider. The executive director of law firm Alston & Bird, Britt was recently named a co-chair of the Human Rights Campaign national board of directors. As such he had tickets to the inauguration and parade.

Although he had tickets to both events, security concerns forced him to choose between the parade and inauguration. Britt chose to watch the parade from HRC's stand, steps away from the presidential reviewing stand.

Decatur City Commissioner **Kecia Cunningham** (right) at the Georgia Inaugural Ball with **Susan Moore**, general counsel for the Georgia Municipal Association, and **Megan Middleton**, a lobbyist for the city of Atlanta. (Photo courtesy Cunningham)

Longtime Atlanta gay rights activist **Don George** (center) in the crowd on Inauguration Day in Washington, D.C. (Photo courtesy of George)

"It was just overwhelming, it brought tears to everyone's eyes," Britt said of his experience. "Just watching the new first family and the transition to power is just overwhelming. It gives me hope that the GLBT community will find its equality sooner rather than later now that we have crossed this line of the first African-American president. It's bittersweet for me that we still don't have our equality yet."

Marching in the parade was a contingent from the Lesbian & Gay Band Association that included five members of the Atlanta Freedom Band.

"That's important," said Cliff Norris, tuba section leader, of playing for the president. "In a way I think about all the people from across the country who come together to do this in two days. It's really a testament to people coming together. There was really no diva factor in this gay organization to do this."

Flute section leader Eddie Young said he will always remember marching in the parade.

"Without a doubt it was going in front of the [presidential] reviewing stand and I was lucky enough to be on the left side and I felt I could almost reach out and touch them," Young said of his most memorable moment. "I appreciate Michelle and Barack Obama being there and their smiles and waves."

Julie Tonner, a trumpeter with the Freedom Band, still got tears in her eyes a day after when she thought about the parade.

"I could see Michelle Obama in her yellow dress standing up and waving, and they told us not to look, but I could see Barack waving at someone else to stand as we went by," she said.

For Terence McPhaul, who works at the National AIDS Education & Services for Minorities Inc., securing a place on the mall meant an early morning Jan. 20.

"I got there about 8 a.m. and there was a sea of people — I've never seen so many people," he said. "But everyone acted with civility. People were willing to sacrifice a lot to be there — there were long lines, long walks, long waits. But just being together to witness that kind of history was an interesting testament to who we are."

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EDITORIAL

Can we change, too?

As we celebrate a turning point in America, it's time to set aside our cynicism for action

By LAURA DOUGLAS-BROWN

IT'S BEEN A ROLLERCOASTER WEEK FOR LESBIAN, gay, bisexual and transgender Atlantans.

On Sunday, we joined other gay people from around the country in being moved by openly gay Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson's prayer at Barack Obama's inauguration kick-off event.

But that was only after we were outraged that it wasn't included in HBO's broadcast of the event, and we had to find it online.

On Monday, we were inspired by dozens of protesters who turned out on a chilly morning to counter Rev. Rick Warren as the keynote speaker at Atlanta's MLK Jr. Day Commemorative Service.

But then we were outraged again when the leader of the King Center suggested the protesters lacked the "maturity" to understand the slain civil rights leader's "beloved community," simply because they opposed a pastor who would deny our right to our own beloveds.

On Tuesday, we watched in awed admiration as President Obama was finally sworn in, heralding a milestone in American politics and what we can only hope will be a new era of inclusion for gay citizens.

But how long until we will be outraged again?

Obama has already disappointed some gay rights activists by not appointing an openly gay person to his Cabinet, and by choosing Warren to give the invocation at his inauguration. And with all of the critical issues and constituencies clamoring for the new president's attention, new disappointments will surely come.

PERHAPS THE CHALLENGE FOR GAY AND TRANS- gender citizens in this era of change is whether we can channel our anger into productive, positive action.

During the previous presidential administration, it was tempting to believe that being angry was enough. With little hope of accomplishing proactive change with a president who threatened to veto any piece of gay-supportive legislation, we could take some comfort in criticism and cynicism.

After all, it's a familiar stance for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, who frequently face taunts and discrimination in our families or in the schoolyard long before we come to understand the legal or political rights we are denied. The stereotypical sarcasm of "bitter queens" often has its start as self-protection for young sissies and dykes, who bury our pain beneath a cloak of jaded cynicism.

Yet as our new president asks us to join him in idealism and optimism despite tough challenges ahead, it's up to all of us to set aside the urge to just critique and complain, and join our fellow citizens in rolling up our shirtsleeves for the hard work ahead.

That may mean turning out to protest when serious issues like Warren and Proposition 8 arise, but also looking for opportunities to work with our usual opponents on issues on which we can agree.

It may mean, as columnist Jennifer Vanasco suggests below, going beyond simply coming out, to actually speaking out — not only when we are angry, but also to the people who love us but may not fully understand or advocate for us.

It may even mean letting some smaller possible slights slide, if they risk detracting us from the larger goals of securing safety, justice and equality for ourselves and our relationships.

To that end, it was a relief to see gay activists and bloggers mostly take a pass on the fact that Obama did not specifically mention gay people or issues in his inauguration speech. While it could have been interpreted as an omission, it's worth noting that he did not include any long laundry lists of constituency groups, and his overall message was about inclusion for all.

As H. Alexander Robinson, head of the gay National Black Justice Coalition, said this week after the gay bishop flap, "If we look for reasons and ways in which we might be overlooked or slighted, we'll always be able to find them."

Let's see what real progress we can find instead.

Editor **Laura Douglas-Brown** can be reached at **lbrown@sovo.com**

VIEWPOINT

Coming out is no longer enough

Just bring visible won't win our equality

By JENNIFER VANASCO

WE USED TO THINK THAT COMING OUT WAS ENOUGH.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!" we said. Come out and live happy, full gay lives. Come out, we said, and be proud, and the world will change.

And the world has changed. We have openly gay members of Congress, gay people in leadership roles in the new Administration, gay talk show hosts, gay pundits. Major corporations sponsor gay events. People watch reality TV shows to learn our sense of style. Come out, come out, we said. And millions of us did.

We came out to ourselves, our friends, our families, our colleagues. We started making a point of telling strangers about our partners if they asked if we were married. The idea was, if people knew how many of us there are, how ordinary we are, how we have dogs and houses and children just like them, they would no longer be afraid. They would no longer think we should be jailed or harassed or fired.

And for the most part, that worked. But just coming out and being gay in the grocery store is no longer enough. Now we need to do more.

A RECENT ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSITION 8 VOTE by professors at NYU and Hunter College showed something disheartening: How a person votes on gay issues is no longer swayed by whether they actually know a gay person. Just knowing a gay person isn't enough.

Instead, which way people vote on gay issues now is almost completely based on whether they identify as liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican. Their vote is affected by whether they were born before or after World War II. And their vote is affected by whether they go to religious services at least weekly.

As Kenneth Sherrill, the Hunter College professor who worked on the study said, "Votes are not personal. They're partisian."

By voting against gay issues, Republicans are further solidifying their Republican-ness; and by voting for them, Democrats assure themselves that they are solid blue. And the voters who cross party lines to vote against or for gays? They go to church. Or they don't.

That it no longer really matters whether voters know someone who is gay is unexpected news. And disturbing. Still, the professors say, all is not lost. The Republican party is shrinking, reducing itself to a party of religious Southern white men. And people are becoming more accepting of gay civil rights at a rate of 1 percent a year — in 10 years, that's a movement of 10 percent. Huge.

BUT MANY OF US DON'T WANT TO WAIT 10 YEARS, or 20 years for our civil rights. We want to work for them now. The professors — and activists at NGLTF and GLAAD — have a solution. Start talking politics.

Not just anonymously on the Internet. Not just among our gay friends. We need to bring politics to the dinner table and the boardroom table. We need to speak up, all the time.

We need to start training ourselves to say, "Did you hear about this gay story in the news? This is why it's important to me."

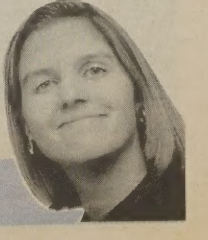
If someone talks about her wedding, we need to say: I wish I could get married in our state. Everyone complaining about working on their 1040s? Note that you and your partner can't file taxes jointly.

Start explaining, all the time, why the gay ban in the military must end, why it must be illegal for us to be fired for being gay, why we should be protected by hate crime laws, why we shouldn't be forbidden from adopting children, why we should be allowed to exercise our right to marry.

It's not enough to proclaim ordinariness anymore. Now we have to start wearing our political identities the way we used to wear rainbow rings.

Thousands of us learned to hold conversations with friends and strangers about politics when we stumped for Obama. We have been advocates for all sorts of politicians.

Now we need to be advocates for ourselves.



Jennifer Vanasco is syndicated columnist. She can be reached at Jennifer.vanasco@gmail.com.

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soapbox

Three ways to make your Southern Voice heard: Send letters to **editor@sovo.com**. • Visit **www.sovo.com** and click "Sound Off." • Use **"Comments"** sections following each story online.

SOUND OFF

Were Mormons wrong to push Calif. gay marriage ban?

Re: "Sharpton decries churches pushing Prop. 8" (news, sovo.com, Jan 12)

Editors' note: *The following conversation is excerpted from comments on our website. Visit www.sovo.com to join the conversation.*

Not involved in any other social concerns, eh? How about the LDS church donating $3 million to the measles initiative (189,261,345 children vaccinated) that has reduced measles deaths by 75 percent in some underdeveloped countries? Or it providing 12 million people with Atmit, a highly nutritional porridge? Or providing 54,840 people with wheelchairs in impoverished nations? Or providing 20,000 people with vision treatment? Or teaching tens of thousands of volunteers neonatal resuscitation?

$3 million??? That's all they could muster??? I happen to know they have tens of millions of dollars to throw around to hurt other people. Why didn't all of that money go to measles? Absolutely sickening.

It's estimated that the Mormon Church raised $20 million to support Proposition 8 in about six months. Doesn't that make $3 million over several years to fight measles look a little paltry? I think Sharpton was asking why was the Mormon Church silent on every civil rights issue in the history of the country, but found the courage to speak out against gays.

On a recent Atlanta visit, Rev. **Al Sharpton** called out Mormons and other religious groups who focus on opposing gay marriage over helping the poor and other social justice issues. (Photo by Matt Schafer)

You are being hyperactively unfair to the LDS church. The measles efforts is just a small part of the overall humanitarian efforts of the LDS church. The overall humanitarian effort is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, especially if you consider the time of the volunteers (e.g., doctors going to third world countries to teach infant resuscitation. Also, since you make no distinction between the LDS church and its members, donations by Mormons themselves are in the billions.

Where were the Mormon leaders mobilizing the members in the 1960s to support the civil rights movement? Why was Utah a slave state? Why is it every time the Mormon church has moved politically it has been to limit the rights of others, while staying silent on issues like slavery, civil rights and suffrage. The Mormon legacy is not one of tolerance, or freedom, or liberty, rather its been on the wrong side of every civil issue since it was created.

YOU MAY BE RIGHT THAT PRESIDENT OBAMA WILL END "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL."
BUT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO ADDRESS ME AS "SERGEANT," NOT "GIRLFRIEND"!

THE Q Online

How would you grade President Bush's legacy?

- He gets an A. He was a great president who made our country safer. 14%
- He gets a B. One of our better presidents; he did a lot to help our country. 11%
- He gets a C. Not the best president, but not the worst. 4%
- He gets a D. His heart was in the right place, but his accomplishments don't reflect that. 10%
- He gets an F. One of the worst presidents in history. He failed with the war, gay rights and everything else. 61%

Visit www.sovo.com to cast your vote in a new Q every week!

Thanks for sharing story of lesbian moms, daughter

Re: "One step at a time" (Community, Jan. 2)

I just wanted to say thank you for sharing this story. I think it's a great thing to bring awareness to all the issues involved — child abuse, gay/lesbian parenting, medical needs. However, when I read that the couple had set up a website for people to make donations, I noticed there wasn't a link to the site. Do you have that link?

Editors' note: *The link was included in print but mistakenly left off of our website. You can reach the family through www.helpmewalk.org*

Gay marriage needed to help create 'forever families'

To those who wonder why the label of "marriage" has importance beyond the bundle of rights in a "civil union": Our 7-year-old daughter recently asked us whether something was wrong with us because her two dads were not allowed to get married and have a "forever family" like others. Sadly, even she intuited the problem — that a "registered domestic partnership" is a second-class status, even if Daddy and Pop-pop are able to cobble together the contracts and other legal arrangements to mimic the real thing.

MAILBOX

Gay voters must now hold Obama accountable

To the Editors:

This election season, predictably, has produced a mixture of good and bad news. For the gay and lesbian community, the good news has been particularly promising: for the most part, the right people won. It was an excellent election for Congressional Democrats. Not only did they retain Congress, but they also strengthened their numbers in the House and the Senate. The best news, however, was the election of Barack Obama, the first black president and long a champion of the gay and lesbian community.

Still, no election can be absolutely positive. The new president's recent moves have been distressing. First, several of Obama's Cabinet picks have been holdovers from the Clinton administration. Evidently, he wants to restore moderation to American policies.

Mostly, this is a positive development. Washington centrists are far better than George W. Bush's "cowboy diplomats" who left the American people mired in war and record-high deficits. Nevertheless, such centrism in the long run could be counter-productive for gays and lesbians. Barack Obama wants to be the new Bill Clinton. Clinton, in many ways, was a fine president — but he was a wan, wobbly supporter of gay rights.

Even more disturbing was Obama's choice to perform the invocation at his inauguration: Rev. Rick Warren. Of all the ministers in the country, why did the new president seem compelled to appoint him? Many political observers claim that this choice further demonstrates Obama's centrism, but Warren is not in the mainstream.

Although the reverend tries to appear congenial and non-threatening, his public statements prove otherwise. In many ways, Warren is a hatemonger. He has repeatedly compared homosexuality with incest and pedophilia. Moreover, he has maintained that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible with one another.

The gay and lesbian community must remind Barack Obama of a few things. This group served as a potent voting bloc for him. They helped him win the election, and now he must start returning the favor. He promised "change," not a weak-willed new centrism. Obama owes this community, and his first tasks now include legalizing civil unions across the United States, and ensuring that same-sex partners will now have the benefits long taken for granted by heterosexual couples.

The group must hold the new president's feet to the fire.

JONATHAN MAXWELL
Taylorsville, Ga.

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JAN. 23 - JAN. 31

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FRIDAY JAN. 23

The **Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce** meets for its Fourth Friday happy hour at Paris on Ponce, 716 Ponce de Leon Place NE. $10 for members, $15 for guests. The event includes appetizers and wine bar. 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., www.atlantagaychamber.org

Gay filmmaker Tom Gustafson's **"Were The World Mine"** — a "musical comedy of errors" — opens at **Midtown Art Cinema**, located in the Midtown Promenade at 8th Street and Monroe Drive, for a one week run. 678-495-1424, www.landmarktheatres.com

Diane Durrett will warm you with her CD release party for her new album, **"Chill."** 8:30 p.m. at the Five Spot, 1123 Euclid Ave. www.fivespot-atl.com, www.dianedurrett.com

SATURDAY JAN. 24

Matt Burkhalter and **Jordan McAuley**, authors of The Out Traveler's Atlanta guidebook, speak about gay travel in Atlanta and beyond at the **Atlanta Travel Expo** at Cobb Galleria Centre, Two Galleria Place. 2:15 p.m. to 3 p.m. 770-955-8000, www.atlantatravelexpo.com

MEGA Family Project offers its signature workshop, **"Creating a Family: Choices for Prospective LGBT Parents,"** with information on adoption, foster parenting and donor insemination. Experts will be on hand to answer questions. 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., St. Mark United Methodist Church, 781 Peachtree St. NE. 404-808-3350, www.megafamilyproject

Georgia Equality supporters are in for a treat with a concert by lesbian-duo **Halcyon** and local lesbian singer **Renee Mixon**. The concert is a fundraiser for the state's largest gay rights organization. 8-10 p.m. at the Jungle, 2115 Faulkner Road. 404-327-9898, www.georgiaequality

Queer youth have designed the hottest fashions to be modeled on the catwalk at the **Rock Winter Fashion Show fundraiser**. 6 p.m. at YouthPride, 1017 Edgewood Ave. 404-521-9711, www.youthpride.org

MONDAY JAN. 26

It's going to be a doozy of a drag show as iconic drag queen **Lady Bunny** joins local drag icon **Bubba D. Licious** for a one-night screening of the movie "Pageant," a documentary about gay men seeking the Miss Gay America crown. Proceeds to benefit Out on Film, Atlanta's LGBT Film Festival. 7:30 p.m., Plaza Theatre, 1049 Ponce de Leon Ave. NE. www.outonfilm.org

PHOTO COURTESY BOUKNIGHT

FRIDAY JAN. 23
Photographer **Jonathan Bouknight** is just one of the many artists featured during **ATLart[09]** taking place at numerous galleries throughout Atlanta. Bouknight's work will be featured in the **Arthouse[09]** exhibit at the glorious home located at 541 West Paces Ferry Road. The annual exhibitions run through Feb. 8. www.atlart.com

PHOTO COURTESY NIZRI

SATURDAY JAN. 24
Miami-based DJ **Oren Nizri**, who hails from Israel, makes his first stop in Atlanta this weekend, manning the tables at Jungle following the Georgia Equality fundraiser. 404-844-8800, myspace.com/jungle_bradwilliams

SATURDAY JAN. 31
New York City's DJ **Alex Lauterstein** and diva **Veronica** bring the legendary club anthem "Someone to Hold" as well as "Release Me" and others to the Jungle via NavigationATL. 10 p.m., 2115 Faulkner Road. www.navigationatl.com

TUESDAY JAN. 27
New York Times bestseller and gay author **E. Lynn Harris**, one of the more notable voices in gay literature, visits Outwrite Bookstore & More to read from his new novel, **"Basketball Jones."** 7:30 p.m. at Outwrite, 991 Piedmont Ave., www.outwritebooks.com

WEDNESDAY JAN. 28
The **Queer Literary Fiction Book Group** meets at Charis Books & More to discuss "Dearest Anne," by Judith Katzir. 7 p.m., Charis, 1189 Euclid Ave. 404-524-0304, www.charisbooksandmore.com

THURSDAY JAN. 29
Taste wines from the Pacific Northwest at **Tastings — A Wine Experience** in Decatur while also learning about a small ship cruise for this fall along the Columbia River in Oregon. 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., 335A West Ponce de Leon Ave. 404-373-3244

FRIDAY JAN. 30
Charis Circle, the fundraising arm of Charis Books & More, will hold a **"Winter Wine Tasting Celebration"** with proceeds to benefit the feminist and lesbian book-store and its programs. 8 p.m., Highland Bakery, 655 Highland Ave. 1189 Euclid Ave. 404-524-0304, charisbooksandmore.com

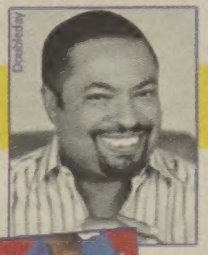
upcoming

Visit **www.sovo.com** for expanded calendars and organization listings covering nightlife, sports, spirituality and health.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					JAN. 23 **'Were the World Mine'** opens at Midtown Art. landmarktheater.com **Phillip Glass' "Akhnaten'** opens at the Atlanta Opera. www.atlantaopera.org	**JAN. 24** **DJ Oren Nizri** at Jungle. **'For the Bible Tells Me So'** screening at Unitarian Universalist. www.uuca.org **Rock Winter Fashion Show** at YouthPride. youthpride.org
JAN. 25 **'Sunday Night Live'** Hip-hop and R&B at Club Europe. clubeurope.net	**JAN. 26** **Outreach Initiative** black gay youth drop-in hours at AID Atlanta. www.aidatlanta.org	**JAN. 27** **E. Lynn Harris** at Outwrite. www.outwritebooks.com **'Stomp!'** opens at the Fox. www.foxtheatre.org	**JAN. 28** **Gay Fathers of Atlanta** at Atlanta-Fulton library. www.gfoatlanta.org **Queer Literary Fiction book group** at Charis. charisbooksandmore.com	**JAN. 29** **Line-dance lessons** at 3-Legged Cowboy. www.3leggedcowboy.net	**JAN. 30** **Dancing Monkey Cabaret** 'New Year, New World' at Aurora Theatre. dancingmonkeycabaret.com **Winter Wine Tasting** at Highland Bakery for Charis Circle. www.chariscircle.org	**JAN. 31** **Stage Door Divas** and **Tuckerettes** at Stage Door. www.stagedoor.biz
FEB. 1 **Gay yoga classes** at Jai Shanti. www.jaishantiyoga.com	**FEB. 2** **Video Request Night** at Amsterdam. amsterdam-atlanta.com	**FEB. 3** **Wii with Dee** at Felix's on the Square. 404-249-7899	**FEB. 4** **Pride Bowling** at 300 Atlanta. 770-451-8605	**FEB. 5** **'Dracula'** at the Atlanta Ballet. www.atlantaballet.com	**FEB. 6** **N.C. Gay Ski Week** with Social Atlanta. www.socialatl.com	**FEB. 7** **National Freedom to Marry Day.** www.freedomtomarry.org **'Freedom to Marry'** documentary at Unitarian Universalist. www.uuca.org
FEB. 8 **Gentle Spirit Christian Church** holds its "Church Without Walls" at Candler Park. gentlespirit.org	**FEB. 9** **Dragamaki** at Nickiemoto's. nickiemotosmidtown.com	**FEB. 10** **'Alternative Perspectives'** on WRFG 89.3 FM. www.wrfg.org	**FEB. 11** **Exploring Genders Through Reading** at Charis. charisbooksandmore.com **Lipstick and Leather** BINGO for PALS. www.palsatlanta.org	**FEB. 12** **Princess Charles's Fashionistas** at Burkhart's. www.burkharts.com **Constance Curry** with 'Wrong Side of Murder Creek' at Charis. www.chariscircle.org	**FEB. 13** **Big Apple Circus' new show 'Play On!'** opens at Stone Mountain. bigapplecircus.org	**FEB. 14** **Love, Laughter & MyTe Dykes** Fundraiser at First Existentialist. www.chariscircle.org **DJ Chris Cox** at Jungle. www.myspace.com/jungle_bradwilliams
FEB. 15 For **gay religious services,** visit sovo.com and click "calendars."	**FEB. 16** **Empowered Men** and **Trans and Friends** at YouthPride. youthpride.org **Sinful Trivia** at Burkhart's. www.burkharts.com	**FEB. 17** **Social Tuesdays** hosts casual networking. www.socialatl.com	**FEB. 18** **Beer Pong** at Paris Decatur. www.parisdecatur.com	**FEB. 19** **Chauncey Beaty** at Cliterati Open No-Mic. myspace.com/cliterati_atlanta **Screen with a Queen** at YouthPride. www.youthpride.org	**FEB. 20** **The Mary Edith Pitts** show at Burkharts. www.burkharts.com	**FEB. 21** **Akoma Book Club** at Charis. www.chariscircle.org

Exciting Events at Your Community Landmark

TUES JAN 27, 7:30pm



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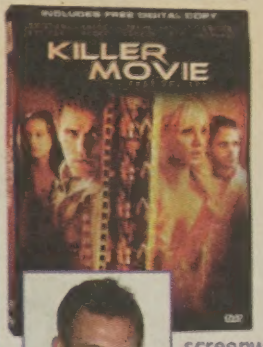

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'WORLD' VIEW

Gay filmmaker Tom Gustafson revisits Shakespeare in 'Were the World Mine'

By GREGG SHAPIRO

LONGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER, AS gay cinema fans know, short films that draw raves on the festival circuit don't always meet with the same success when expanded into feature-length movies. Angela Robinson's "D.E.B.S.," for instance, lost something in the transition, while Lane Janger's "Just One Time" improved slightly. In the case of Tom Gustafson's "Fairies," a short film that left audiences craving more, the end result, "Were The World Mine," pays off in every way imaginable.

Timothy (Tanner Cohen) is a gay kid at a private school. The members of the rugby team regularly use Timothy for target practice during gym class dodge ball games. His single mother, Donna (Judy McLane), struggling to make ends meet, takes a job working for cosmetics queen Nora Fay (Jill Larson). His best pals, straight couple Max (Ricky Goldman) and Frankie (Zelda Williams), are supportive of his endeavors.

But it isn't until Timothy is cast as Puck in a school production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," by drama teacher Ms. Tebbit (Wendy Robie), that his life undergoes a major change. After whipping up Puck's love potion, he suddenly finds himself in a position to make his world a much more loving place.

Southern Voice recently spoke with Gustafson about "Were The World Mine," which opens at Jan. 23 at the Midtown Art Cinema.

SoVo: *I recently re-watched your award-winning short feature "Fairies." I really enjoyed "Were The World Mine," but going back to "Fairies" gave me a chance to refresh my memory with the source material. "Fairies" received a warm reception at a number of GLBT film festivals when it was shown. What was your reaction to that?*

Tom Gustafson: First, I'm really proud of "Fairies." I'm happy that I got the chance to go back and revisit that story and expand it. But I was really proud of the short and it was well-received. It played about a hundred festivals and as we were traveling around to the festivals, it was the audience, as well as the programmers, who kind of tipped us off to the fact that people wanted to see more.

When we made "Fairies," we thought it was done. That was the idea. It was kind of a one-joke short film. It wasn't until we were about halfway through with our festival run that we started thinking about the idea of expanding it. At first, we were actually approached by one of the gay cable channels to possibly make it into some sort of series. When we started playing with that idea, my partner [Cory Krueckeberg] and I said no, first it has to be a feature film.

SoVo: *What was involved in expanding the story?*

Gustafson: We immediately went back to the text of "Midsummer Night's Dream" and said, if we're going to expand this short, how can we do it in a smart way? Obviously, we trusted Shakespeare on that. We tried to use his story and his characters as the basis and inspiration for all of the expansion.

SoVo: *Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is at the center of "Were The World Mine." What role has Shakespeare played in your life?*

Gustafson: Growing up in Illinois, and I think it's probably all over the country, you were "forced" to read Shakespeare. As a high school student, I didn't have an appreciation for it. It was one of those things that I kind of dreaded, which is so funny to look back on now. How rich his stories are, from everything to the way they're presented with the gender-bending presentation.

There is so much in the stories that is relevant to today, whether it's about the outsider or gender, and I think that's why it seemed like such a great fit for our story. Not only is it about a high school student who is forced to do Shakespeare, but it also opens up this whole new world.

SoVo: *With that in mind, do you have hopes that "Were The World Mine" will reach an audience beyond adults or gay adults to the considerable young adult and teen audiences?*

Gustafson: We definitely hope for that. One thing that we've been doing with all of the festivals that we've been playing is pushing them to invite youth to the screenings. Some festivals have been absolutely amazing with it. In Vancouver, they did two separate screenings for youth. They did this whole youth variety show after our screening th was kind of inspired by Shakespeare and by the film.

We definitely want it to play to youth. It's a way for them to see Shakespeare in a different light. It's an alternative to that "High School Musical" stuff that's out there [laughs].

Please see **'WORLD'** on **Page 28**

Photo courtesy Speak Productions

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An 'L' of a party

Packed house for Atlanta premiere of Showtime's 'L Word'

By DYANA BAGBY
dbagby@sovo.com

HUNDREDS OF WOMEN WHO LOVE WOMEN packed the Jungle Jan. 15 for the sixth season premiere of "The L Word," Showtime's sexy Sapphic series. The new season debuted on Showtime Jan. 18 and continues Sunday nights.

The annual premiere party easily qualifies as one of Atlanta's biggest lesbian parties. Scores of women danced to the beats of DJ Vicki Powell and were entertained by the unofficial head lesbian in Atlanta, Melissa Carter of Q100, as well as Rose Rollins, who plays the sexy military stud "Tasha" on the show.

"I love Atlanta! And I'm not saying that just because I'm here!" Rollins shouted to the die-hard fans who roared back enthusiastically.

Last week's party marked the end of an era: The first show about lesbians to have mainstream success is over after its sixth season. Showtime has confirmed an "L Word" spinoff starring "Alice," played by Leisha Hailey.

And guess what — Showtime executives have confirmed that the spinoff, reportedly called "The Farm," is set in a women's prison. Hmmm. Jenny. Dead. Alice. Prison. Maybe one of the most beloved characters on "The L Word" finally did what everyone else has wanted to do since Season 2.

For a photo album from this event, visit **www.sovo.com**

Rose Rollins, a.k.a. 'Tasha' on 'The L Word,' joined hundreds of Atlanta women Jan. 15 for the local premiere of the show. (Rollins and group photo by Sher Pruitt; interview photos by Dyana Bagby)

THE Q — Who killed Jenny?

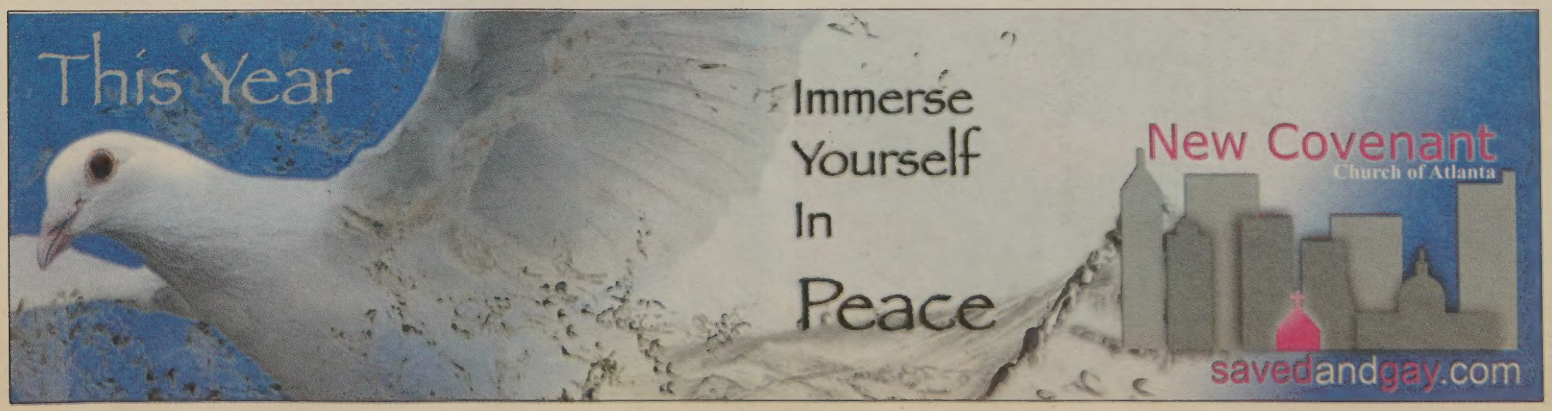
"I can't tell!"
Rose Rollins
"Tasha" on "The L Word"

"I think those kids from 'South Park' did it. I think they got confused and got Kenny mixed up with Jenny and knocked off Jenny by mistake."
Cynthia Craig
Volunteer
Human Rights Campaign

"I think they all killed her. It was a conspiracy. I'm just glad she's dead. I won't miss her at all. And she fooled around with guys; that was weird."
Susan Bird
Owner of Paris Decatur

"I think Jenny killed herself. She was such a miserable, sad person. Although at the end she was redeemed … She found a convoluted way to kill herself and blame someone else in the meantime. Very 'Law & Order,' very 'CSI.'"
Fiona Zedde
author

"I don't care who killed her as long as she's dead - I know that's a terrible thing to say. Jenny was my least favorite character."
Melissa Carter
Q-100's The Bert Show



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'Pageant' queens

Out on Film returns with heart-warming documentary and a contest of its own

FILM
LAURA DOUGLAS-BROWN

"PAGEANT," AN AMUSING YET TOUCHING documentary about the Miss Gay America pageant, touts a tagline of "fifty men ... fifty dreams ... one crown." But more than one crown and even more dreams will be on the line Jan. 26 when the film screens as the 2009 debut effort from Out on Film, Atlanta's gay film festival.

For years, Out on Film was put on by IMAGE Film & Video, the same organization that also produced the Atlanta Film Festival. Last year, the gay film fest split from IMAGE, now known as Atlanta Film Festival 365, with goals of increasing gay involvement in planning and avoiding playing second fiddle to the more general festival.

As a casualty of the change, 2008 passed without the major, stand-alone gay film festival that many fans had come to look forward to each fall. Now, the new board of Out on Film seeks to return the festival to community prominence as more than a single annual event.

"Our goal is to really put Atlanta on the map for its gay and lesbian film festival," says Jim Farmer, festival director. As Out on Film turns 21, "I think we have the support from our community to do this, and I think it is time," he says.

Farmer, an independent film publicist who also serves as theater columnist for Southern Voice, is joined on the Out on Film board by many familiar names from the local gay business community.

Heidi Reis, editor in chief of the lesbian magazine Labrys, is co-chair of the new festival. "Our main goal is to give our community something they can be proud of," she says. "Atlanta has such a big gay community, so we should be able to do things big."

ORGANIZERS' "BIG" DREAMS FOR OUT on Film include expanding beyond a once-per-year effort. "Pageant," which screens at the Plaza Theatre, is the first of what they hope will be monthly events, designed to raise money and visibility for the festival and generate year-round excitement over gay cinema.

Out On Film screens 'Pageant,' the behind the scenes story of five gay men competing in a drag beauty contest, on Jan. 26.

Out on Film also plans a four-day festival in late spring, billed as "Out on Film Weekend" and set for May 28-31. This "mini-festival" will help build momentum for the full-fledged return of Out in Film, scheduled for October to coincide with National Coming Out Day.

And the new leaders are doing more than just showing movies.

The "Pageant" screening features a pageant of its own after the film ends. Local drag star Bubba D. Licious will be joined by the legendary Lady Bunny, who is in town guest starring in "Veranda II" at the Ansley Park Playhouse, to host an informal Miss Out on Film contest.

While the competition is certainly not as fierce as in the film, hopefuls "should come dressed" to compete, Reis says.

The five "most eager" contestants will be chosen from the audience, with those in attendance picking the winner, who will receive a sash, tiara, and the chance to represent Out on Film at future events, Farmer adds.

As with the festival itself, "we hope to make it a tradition," he says.

'Pageant'
Jan. 26, 7:30 p.m.
Plaza Theatre
1049 Ponce De Leon Ave.
www.outonfilm.org,
www.pageantmovie.com
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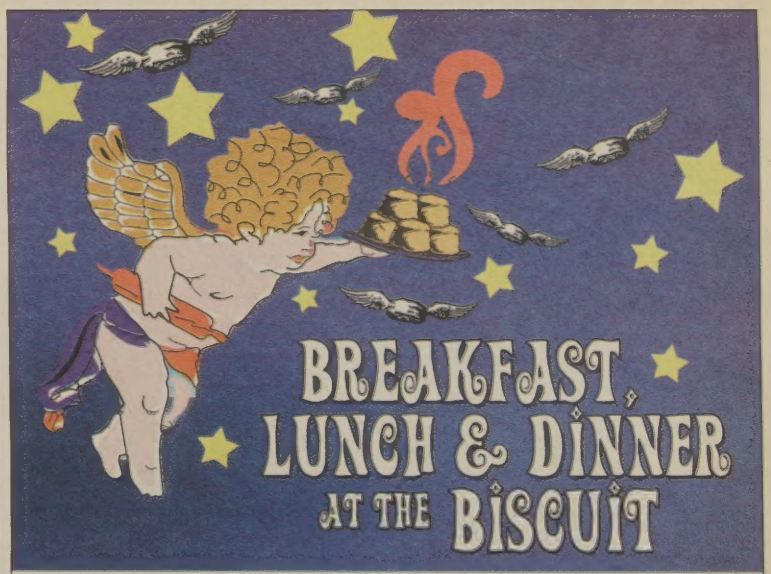

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Hit the slopes

Even non-skiers can enjoy N.C. Gay Ski Weekend

SOUTHERN VOICE TRAVEL
RYAN LOFTIS

AN ATLANTA GAY MEN'S SOCIAL GROUP IS offering a chance to hit the slopes close to home next month.

Social Tuesdays co-founder Kurt Edwins is producing N.C. Gay Ski Weekend, also known as "Snow Bunny Takeover," to be held Feb. 6 -8 in Blowing Rock, N.C. Greg Jung of Blowing Rock is co-producing. Social Tuesdays is one of the weekend's sponsors, as is The Inn at Crestwood, the weekend's official lodge.

The event's purpose is to introduce Blowing Rock to people from across the Southeast. Edwins says the ski weekend is consistent with Social Tuesdays' goal of presenting members with social opportunities they otherwise wouldn't know about.

"Being gay in the South, there's not a lot to do," Edwins says. "From our standpoint in Atlanta, we're trying to create and introduce people to activities in the Southeast and really bring people together to socialize. Ski Weekend is a great opportunity to bring people together, and you don't have to go to Aspen to do it."

With a 3,500-foot elevation and temperatures typically 10-15 degrees colder than those in Charlotte, the state's largest city, Jung says visiting Blowing Rock is a "true mountain experience."

"I would equate it on a much smaller scale to Boulder, Colo.," he says.

Citing the affluence and shopping venues of downtown Blowing Rock, Jung says, "It really attracts a lot of visitors, especially in the summer."

DESPITE THE EVENT'S TITLE, THE PRODUCERS stress that those not wishing to ski will still enjoy the weekend.

"If you do not ski, there are plenty of opportunities far-reaching that don't involve skiing but involve being in some of the most scenic areas in the Southeast," Edwins says.

Those opportunities include taking a shuttle to explore the downtown area or enjoying the indoor heated pool, Jacuzzi and day spa.

Those who do want to ski are not required to bring their own equipment. The weekend's official ski resort will be Sugar Mountain Resort.

Shuttle services to Sugar Mountain will be available 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Feb. 7. Guests wishing to ski on other days must make their own arrangements.

Check-in at The Inn at Crestwood begins 3 p.m. Feb. 6, but the weekend really begins with the wine and cheese reception scheduled for that evening in the resort's bar/library area.

Following continental breakfast the next morning, guests will head to their chosen destinations for the day.

The Icy Hot Pool Party begins 6 p.m. Feb. 7 in the resort's pool/sauna/spa and steam room annex, followed by a dinner with salmon filets, rib-eye steaks and pork tenderloins on the menu. The three-hour Snowball Dance Party kicks off at 9 p.m., an event Jung anticipates up to 200 guests will attend. Andy Kastanas, voted Charlotte's Best Club DJ for 11 years by the Creative Loafing newspaper, will be providing the music and dance beats for both parties.

The resort will offer a brunch to guests on Feb. 8 before they begin their drives home.

Two all-inclusive ticket packages, Stay & Ski and Stay & Play, are available. The packages offer almost identical amenities, save for transportation: Stay & Ski provides transportation to and from Sugar Mountain, while Stay & Play transports guests to and from downtown Blowing Rock for shopping.

The Stay & Ski ticket is $545, while two cost $740 ($370 per person). An individual Stay & Play ticket is $470, while two tickets are $590 ($295 per person).

In addition, the You Pick 'Em package offers tickets for individual events at various prices.

N.C. Gay Ski Weekend features skiing at Sugar Mountain Ski Resort. (Photo by Johnathan Burton Photography)

"It's very cost-effective as far as a trip for the weekend," Jung says. "It's a cost-effective, fun weekend where you're interacting with people not only from Atlanta, but throughout the Southeast."

Jung encourages guests to make their arrangements as soon as possible because ticket prices will increase Jan. 26 and reservations will not be accepted after Feb. 5.

All arrangements can be made by visiting Social Tuesday's Web site, www.socialatl.com, for a link to the weekend's Web site. The NC Gay Ski Weekend Facebook account is also available for those seeking more information.

SINCE LAUNCHING SOCIAL TUESDAYS IN SEPTEMBER 2008, Edwins and business partner Chris Coleman are surprised by the group's success. The weekly Tuesday night meetings, at some of Atlanta's hottest venues, typically attract more than 100 people, and Edwins says restaurants have begun offering to host future meetings.

"The numbers are the response," Edwins says. "Wow, wow is my response. It's just been mind-blowing to me how successful this has been."

Edwins describes the meetings as being about "cocktails, conversation and connection," opportunities to simply relax and have fun.

"I feel like I'm at a house party, but in a restaurant venue," Coleman says of his experiences at meetings. "It's that relaxed."

Their success has allowed Edwins and Coleman to pursue other endeavors. While they decline to publicly discuss their plans yet, they encourage members to regularly check Social Tuesdays' website for updates.

N.C. Gay Ski Weekend
Feb. 6 – 8
Blowing Rock, N.C.
www.socialatl.com

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Fervent 'Prayers'

Earnest Lifetime TV movie tells an important story for the right audience

SOUTHERN VOICE TV GREG MARZULLO

SOMETIMES OUR PRAYERS GO UNANSWERED and sometimes we get what we want but through very different means than what we had expected.

So it went with Mary Griffith, a Christian suburban housewife who devoted her life to developing a closer relationship to God. But when her son was outed to her, she turned up the homophobic religious rhetoric familiar to so many gay people. Her story is the subject of "Prayers for Bobby," a made-for-television movie premiering on the Lifetime Network Saturday.

The film is a somewhat obvious attempt to teach people about the experience of gay youth and their need for familial and community support, but it still manages to be emotionally effective, in no small part because of Sigourney Weaver, who plays Griffith.

'Prayers for Bobby'
Premiers Saturday, Jan. 24
Lifetime Television

Griffith's son Bobby eventually moved to Portland, Ore., when he was 20 to escape the Jonathan Edwards-like pronunciations of his mother, but his confusion over his sexual orientation and how it related to God sent him into a deep depression. In August 1983, Bobby leapt off a bridge and into the path of an 18-wheeler, which killed him instantly. At the funeral service in his hometown, the pastor told the entire congregation that the young man's lifestyle choices obviously led him down a dark road that ended in death.

Through her grief, Griffith eventually joined PFLAG and even became president of the East San Francisco Bay chapter. She appeared on talk shows and testified before Congress about the needs of gays and lesbians. She gained a greater understanding of God and a closer relationship to her faith, but at a horrible price.

Her journey (and to some extent that of Bobby) is the focal point of "Prayers for Bobby," an occasionally manipulative but still-powerful film about the ways that religion and family can warp love of all kinds.

Ryan Kelley as Bobby and **Scott Bailey** as his boyfriend, David, in Lifetime's 'Prayers for Bobby.' Below, **Sigourney Weaver** as Mary in the same movie. (Images courtesy of Lifetime)

THE FILM FOLLOWS GRIFFITH'S story pretty accurately, filling in the emotional heft in private scenes between the family members, who all try to "help" Bobby through his difficulty by sending him to therapy, going on manly hikes and taping index cards with scriptural notes all over the house.

"Prayers" is clearly intended for converting Lifetime's adult female audience to a more tolerant perspective, and it just might succeed thanks to Weaver's powerhouse performance. Her sense of annoyance, disgust and anger over Bobby's choice to ignore her ministrations to him are palpable and anyone would shrivel under her discouraging gaze. Yet, this isn't some one-sided portrayal of bigotry — as a God-fearing woman, her concern is that her son will be cast into a lake of fire for all eternity. Within that context, it could be suggested that she's actually trying to be good to her child.

Yet after he dies and she enters her own dark night of the soul, Weaver lets the horses out of the barn — sobbing, raging and sinking into a depression that inspires pity despite her abandonment of Bobby in his hour of need. And when she finally breaks, there's no sense of satisfaction as a viewer — only a profound feeling of loss for her and the regrettable choices she's made.

Other performances in the film are equally strong, most notably from Bobby (Ryan Kelly) and Griffith's husband, a wonderful Henry Czerny whose subtle hands-off approach to the entire ordeal, sadly, makes him just as culpable as his wife. Gay actor Dan Butler (who became a household face as Bulldog on the sitcom "Frasier") makes an appearance as an understanding gay pastor at a local Metropolitan Community Church in Griffith's town.

This is a story that needs to be told and not just to the choir, but to the entire church.

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E. Lynn Harris returns to Outwrite

SO VO SOUTHERN VOICE **BOOKS**
MATT SCHAFER

E. Lynn Harris (file photo)

E. Lynn Harris started out by selling his books out of the back of his car at hair salons. Now he is making another triumphant visit to Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse to introduce his latest novel, "Basketball Jones."

Harris launched a career that earned multiple bestsellers, strong reviews and legions of devoted fans, including many African-American gay men who were elated to finally find empathetic, entertaining portrayals of men struggling with the boundaries of sexual orientation.

Now, after nine novels and a moving 2004 memoir, "What Becomes of the Brokenhearted," Harris is one of the few gay authors to routinely hit the New York Time Best Seller List.

After taking a new direction with "Just Too Good to Be True," "Jones" marks Harris' return to soulful stories about black gay men. In his new novel, his second released in six months, Jones explores the closeted relationship between an NBA player, his lover and the woman he marries to protect his public image.

"He is one of the most successful black gay authors, and he was one of the first to openly write about the black gay lifestyle," Outwrite Owner Philip Rafshoon said.

Harris considers Atlanta home and has set a number of his novels in the city. His visits to Outwrite are always crowded with fans of his work.

"We expect a pretty good crowd," Rafshoon said.

The appearance at Outwrite comes on the same day the book will be released to the public.

E. Lynn Harris
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A modern gay take on Shakespeare's 'Dream'

'WORLD', continued from Page 19

SoVo: Absolutely. I'm glad that you mentioned the musical aspect of it, because the expansion of the music in "Were The World Mine" is considerable. What can you tell me about the role of music in the movie?

Gustafson: Music is its own character in the film. The music is not just his escape, but it becomes his reality. We wanted to play with how music can transform that — from fantasy to reality.

For the expansion, the first thing that we did was go back to the Chicago musicians that we had for "Fairies," Tim Sandusky and Jessica Fogle. Then we looked at the script and asked, "Where can musical numbers really move the story forward?" Not just "show tunes," but where can we put it that it would really do something for the story. We tried to have that be the driving force for the music.

SoVo: "Were The World Mine" also made me think about how movies and movie musicals functioned as escapism during troubled times in the past, and can do so again now with this senseless war and the looming depression.

Gustafson: When we started making this film, we wanted to make a feel-good, optimistic film. There's a lot of gay film out there that is so depressing. Especially for gay youth. Definitely, our short film was all about the bullied kid.

When we started making the expansion [we decided that] Timothy doesn't have to just be this bullied kid. He could be completely comfortable with who he is and let's make it more of a celebration. We tried to keep the spirit of that in it. That's why I think that audiences at the festivals have embraced it. It is an optimistic story. Some people may say that that's its biggest fault. But I think people want to see something feel-good and optimistic.

SoVo: How much of Tom is in Timothy?

Gustafson: In the short film, it definitely was. And I'm the first to say that the short film was autobiographical. There were characters in "Fairies" and scenes that were pulled right out of my growing up in a small town.

But I think that the one change that we made to Timothy that I hope people will see is that he is very comfortable in who he is at the very beginning of the film. Sure, he might get picked on, but he can see further ahead. I feel like it's changed so much from what our original Timothy was; which was more like me. Timothy's much cooler than I was.

SoVo: Wendy Robie, who "Twin Peaks" fans will recognize from her portrayal of Nadine, reprises her role of Ms. Tebbit.

Gustafson: Honestly, there would be no Ms. Tebbit without Wendy Robie. When we presented the script for "Fairies" to her, I wanted her to play the mother. I was a huge "Twin Peaks" fan, and I thought there was no way that Wendy would ever do a no-money short film. Immediately she said, "I'm in. No matter what. But I want to play the teacher." … When we decided to expand, Cory and I immediately said, "Wendy is Ms. Tebbit, and we can't have anybody else be Ms. Tebbit. Even though there were investors and production companies saying to us, "You're in a position where you can have a 'name actor' and you might be jeopardizing some money." And we said, "No way." I could not see this film without Wendy.

Wendy Robie as Ms. Tebbit in 'Were the World Mine' (Photo courtesy Speak Productions)

SoVo: What is about your working relationship with Cory Krueckeberg makes it such a success?

Gustafson: Well, we're partners. We've been together for about 10 years, which I guess makes it both an amazing partnership and a challenging one [laughs]. I think there's nobody else that I would want to work with so closely. He knows exactly what I'm thinking and I know what he's thinking. So far it's worked well.

SoVo: "Were The World Mine" has played at mainstream and gay film festivals. Would you say that the audience reactions have been the same across the board?

Gustafson: Yes. … At the mainstream festivals there is a wider mix of people that come out, which is really exciting; men and women. At the gay film festivals, we're playing to a lot of men. So, I think that the really exciting part about playing the mainstream festivals — and there are still tons of gay people in the audience — we get to see a more mixed male/female crowd. I definitely don't think this movie is meant for just gay men.

'Were the World Mine'
Opens Friday, Jan. 23
Midtown Art Cinema
931 Monroe Dr.
678-495-1424
www.speakproductions.com

So long, Boy George

Brit singer sentenced to prison, future U.S. visits unlikely

Boy George (Photo by AP)

dish
There's a Fine Line Between Telling the Truth and Talking Trash

Dish hates to be the bearer of bad news during these happiest of days, in the wake of our glorious presidential inauguration. But she would be remiss if she did not mention the unfortunate plight of George O'Dowd, better known to the Karma Chameleons of the world as **BOY GEORGE**.

Months ago, George was arrested in London after being accused of attacking a male escort named **AUDUN CARLSEN**, who said George lured him to his apartment, handcuffed him to the wall and slapped him around a bit with chains and whips and such. And it wasn't in a fun sexy way.

In his defense, George said he believed the escort had snooped through his home computer and stolen embarrassing photos and he wanted to keep Carlsen there while he checked to make sure.

A jury in London convicted George last month of the crime and last week a judge sentenced him to a whopping 15 months in jail, saying the crime was obviously premeditated and "so serious that only an immediate sentence of imprisonment can be justified."

As a result of the conviction, George will most likely never be allowed entrance back into the United States, which has strict laws against granting visitation rights to convicted criminals. Granted, he doesn't have much of a career anymore, but it would have been fun seeing him DJ at a club now and then.

Rabid Roberts

Dish would like to take a moment to address the unfortunate antics of the beloved **JULIA ROBERTS**, who has morphed herself from sensational movie star to hysterical YouTube star.

The YouTube clip in question shows Roberts confronting a paparazzi photographer who had apparently been following her for a few days. Roberts — who is driving a minivan, a gaffe to be discussed at another time — threatens the pap, points a finger in his face and lets fly a string of obscenities rarely heard outside a Rod Blagojevich deposition.

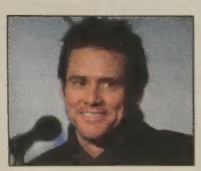
Unfortunately, she gave the photographer exactly what he wanted, and Dish recommends not reacting at all when dealing with such a problem. Dish was once followed by paparazzi herself — although they weren't paparazzi exactly, it was really just the camera crew when she auditioned to be on "The Biggest Loser" — but nevertheless, Dish has experience with this Hollywood nuisance, and she suggests no one purchase magazines that profit off the story. Instead, go back to reading about Heidi Montag, whose publicist is paying good money to publishers to continue writing about her.

Julia Roberts (Photo by AP)

Love for 'Phillip Morris'

On to a bit of cheerful news: The gay-centric film "I Love You Phillip Morris" is generating much media hype, thanks to strong performances by **JIM CARREY** and **EWAN MCGREGOR**.

The film was a major hit at Sundance and critics have especially lauded Carrey for his portrayal of "Steve," a recently out gay man who dives into a string of scandal-soaked love affairs as he tries to find his own identity (McGregor plays an earnest, vulnerable love interest). Rumor has it the film, which will be released in the U.S. on Valentine's Day, is filled with enough steamy sex scenes it could warrant the NC-17 rating.


Jim Carrey (Photo by AP)

Dish follows this movie with great interest, considering the heavy sex content with Jim Carrey. And considering the fact that he's involved with **JENNY MCCARTHY**, no slouch in the sexy department herself. He must have something impressive going on.

Send comments, suggestions to **Dish@sovo.com**

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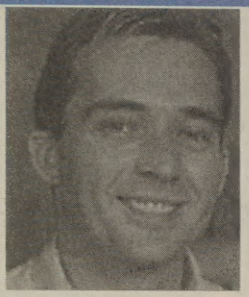

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3. Toss the salad with the Classic Signature dressing and Private Selection salad ingredients and top with the chicken strips.

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